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THE MANIAC RIDER

OR,

THE MYSTERY OF HAWKESWOOD GRANGE.

By HORACE APPLETON.

Author of "The Maniac Pirate," "The Man of Gold," "The Coral Cave," "From Pole to Pole," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MURDER.

"ARE you sure of it, Berkeley?"

"Never was more certain."

"You have probed the case deeply?"

"I have."

"And as a result, you have arrived at the conclusion that Leslie Huntley is the murderer of Baron Hawkeswood?"

"Exactly."

"And Huntley—who is he?"

"No other than the lover of Edith Hawkeswood, the baron's daughter."

"What could have been his motive in the crime?"

"Simple enough. The baron opposed the marriage."

"And to gain his point and the Hawkeswood estate, Leslie Huntley murdered the master of Hawkeswood Grange?"

"Precisely, sir. That is the correct diagnosis of this case," and the little detective rubbed his hands briskly together.

This conversation occurred in a small square wainscoted apartment in a large building, in the center of the great city of London.

It was nothing more or less than the office of a private detective agency.

The speakers were Bob Berkeley, detective, and the chief of detectives.

Their conversation as I have detailed it, may be comprehensive enough to the reader, as concerning a murder case.

Murder had been done.

And foul murder also.

No prettier estate was there in Suffolk, than Hawkeswood Grange.

The grange had been the property of a dozen Hawkeswoods.

The old baron, who could trace his lineage back to the Cromwellian times, was very proud of his long line of ancestry.

His daughter, Edith, was the pride of his heart, and a very beautiful girl.

Besides her, there dwelt at the grange, a nephew, by name Ward Westmore.

In some manner Westmore, whom Edith never liked, had ingratiated himself into the good graces of the old baron.

Indeed, the baron had much favored a marriage of his daughter with Westmore.

But Edith rebelled.

She detested the nephew.

Her affections had become centered in another direction.

The estate of Huntley, adjoining the Hawkeswood land, was much impoverished.

There had always been a bitter feud between the former masters of Huntley and Hawkeswood.

Huntley, after ten years rule by a dissipated heir, was left in an impoverished condition, to Leslie Huntley.

Leslie was a noble-minded and generous-hearted youth.

He was much beloved by the country folks, to whom he was always kind.

In childhood days, Leslie and Edith had been fast friends.

And as they grew older, this friendship ripened into a deeper feeling.

And finally Leslie went away to India.

And before they went, love-vows were pledged.

When he returned from the Crimea, a hero and covered with laurels won in battle, he applied at once for the hand of his true love.

But now came the inevitable rough side of the true lover's course.

His application for the hand of the heiress of Hawkeswood was met with stern displeasure by the old Baron.

"My daughter shall never wed with a Huntley," he had said.

Leslie went away from this meeting with the irate master of Hawkeswood in a whirl of despair.

Shortly after this, not many weeks later, the entire coun-

try was thrown into the deepest horror by the news of a horrible tragedy.

The master of Hawkeswood had been murdered in cold blood.

More than this, the old baron had died seemingly an unnatural father.

His will, upon being produced, was found to revert the entire estate of Hawkeswood to the dark nephew, Ward Westmore.

And now, at the stage which opens our story, Bob Berkeley, London's shrewdest detective, had arrived at the startling conclusion that the baron's murderer was Leslie Huntley.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH BERKELEY GETS SNUBBED.

"I HOPE you may unearth this case, Berkeley."

"So do I. The remuneration is ample."

"Not only that, but it will entail a great deal of credit to you."

"True, and rest assured, chief, I *will* unearth it."

"I wish you luck."

"Thanks, now—your advice."

"I cannot advise you to do different. Your present course is all commendable."

"Very well. I will report in another week."

"As you please."

"Good-bye."

The door of the chief's office opened, and Bob Berkeley bowed himself out.

A moment later and he was upon the street.

As he reached the curbstone a low chuckle burst from his lips.

"Ah, a straight course, and clear sailing. Bob Berkeley, you have made your fortune. If I do not feather my nest out of this little racket, then I am mistaken, that's all."

With these mysterious words the keen detective crossed the street.

The street was narrow.

It was also filled with teams.

It had been raining and the pavements were slippery.

Just in front of the detective a young girl, modestly dressed, slender, fair, and frail, was endeavoring to keep her equilibrium.

In this she was unsuccessful.

And placing her tiny foot upon a slippery paving-block, she fell prostrate.

In a moment the detective sprang forward.

But ere he reached her a strong arm thrust him aside, and a tall, well-formed young man intercepted him in his act of gallantry.

Berkeley had had an end in view in springing to the young girl's assistance.

She was pretty, and it vexed him not a little to be superseded in his purpose.

His face flushed hotly, and springing forward he brought his hand down forcibly upon the other's shoulder.

Like a flash the young man wheeled.

This brought him face to face with the infuriated detective.

"What do you mean, sir?"

Handsome, clear-cut, and patrician in their cast were the other's features.

By this time the young lady had been assisted in safety to her feet.

And instinctively Berkeley all at once arrived at the sage conclusion that he had made a serious mistake.

"I—I—what do you mean?" he stammered. "Is this the way you treat a man of my cloth? Do you know who I am?"

"Why, my dear man, are you out of your mind? What have I done to you?" quietly said the young man.

"What have you done?" said the detective, getting red in the face and much confused. "Why, sir—what right, sir—had you to go in front of me?"

"I beg your pardon," said the young man, very quietly, and with just a gleam of mischief in his steel blue eyes.

"But was the young lady under your protection?"

"N-no; not exactly, but——"

"Very well, she is under mine, now. Have you anything more to say?"

The young man's gaze had assumed a very comprehensive aspect to the detective, and as he measured the supple, well-knit form before him, he beat a retreat, figuratively speaking.

The young man had wheeled, and with the girl upon his arm had approached a carriage near the curbing.

It was an elegant equipage.

And as the detective glanced at the coat-of-arms he gave a start.

It was the family crest of Hawkeswood.

"By Jupiter," he ejaculated.

He stood in a stupor and watched the carriage out of sight.

Then he gave vent to a low whistle.

"That is Edith Hawkeswood," he ejaculated. "Well and good, but who is the swell with her, I wonder?"

Berkeley, though a keen sleuth-hound, was unpolished in manners, and beyond the technicalities of his calling and a certain indefatigability of purpose, a nonentity.

As a detective he was a success.

As a man of the world, or a gentleman, he was a failure.

His ideas were too "compressed," too exceedingly narrow.

"By the piper of Moses," he muttered, as he strode away. "Can that be the nephew? No, I have it—that is the *murderer*, Leslie Huntley. Ah, ha, mighty high and lofty chap, ain't he? Well, it's to my humble belief that he won't be so vastly elevated before many days."

CHAPTER III.

THE ARREST.

AND now, gentle reader, we will take you to Hawkeswood Grange.

Into its long, richly furnished drawing rooms.

Replete with all the splendor of the orient. Turkish hangings, rugs, little alcoves filled with statuary, works of art upon either side.

By the long front windows of plate glass, stood a fair female figure.

Clad in a loose, yet exceedingly delicate and graceful

mourning dress of a faint, bluish tint, stood Edith Hawkeswood.

It had been two months since the Baron's terrible death. Only yesterday it was that the cruel will had been read.

The cruel mandate which made of a beautiful, talented, and accomplished young girl fit for an Earl's wife, a homeless outcast, a wanderer upon the face of the earth.

But not without friends.

Even the rudest of the country people about had received some kindness at Edith's hands, and remembered her with deepest love.

She could go down and live among them.

"Perhaps, after all, it would be a happier life," she murmured.

"What happier than to fly with me. To become my bride?"

She recoiled as though shot and confronted the speaker.

With laughing face and outstretched hand he stood before her.

"I humbly entreat your pardon for this intrusion," was the apology.

"Leslie!"

"My love!"

"How you frightened me."

She saw now that he had gained admittance by means of the open conservatory door.

He was booted and spurred, and had just ridden over from Huntley.

"You will forgive?"

"Upon conditions."

"Name them."

"That you will not repeat such a thing."

"I dare not promise."

"You mischievous boy," said Edith, with a shy attempt to prevent his drawing her to a warm embrace. "You are always up to some boyish pranks. When will you ever settle down?"

"I have become settled both in mind and purpose," said Leslie Huntley, gravely.

Edith Hawkeswood looked up in shy surprise.

"How?"

"First, you have promised to become my wife, and in that I am happy; secondly, I shall retrieve my fortunes, and we will yet see Huntley Hall upon its former good footing."

"But Hawkeswood——"

"Is basely usurped by a liar, a thief, and a scoundrel. The will is a forgery and the maker a villain, and I swear——"

"Hold, upstart!"

The young man's impassioned utterances were arrested by this ejaculation.

It came from the lips of a tall dark man, who had entered the room unperceived.

Both lovers started back.

"Ward Westmore."

The dark nephew it was.

And now the owner of Hawkeswood.

Whether by fair means or foul, no man as yet knew.

"Leslie Huntley, you are in my house. I have just heard your defamation of my name."

"Well, what of it?"

Leslie was cool and unconcerned.

"Retract them, or by heaven I will thrust them down your throat."

"Proceed with the operation at once."

"Do you dare me?"

"No, I defy you, I scorn you."

With a savage oath Westmore sprang forward.

Edith screamed.

In another moment the two angry men had come together.

A sharp decisive struggle, and Westmore was hurled to the floor.

Springing to his feet he would have rushed with greater fury upon his foe, had not a startling thing at that moment occurred.

The door was burst open.

And into the room sprang the detective, Bob Berkeley.

At his back was a force of constabulary.

"Hold, Leslie Huntley, I arrest you in the Queen's name for the murder of Baron Hawkeswood."

Leslie Huntley reeled back with ghostly white face. The announcement so startling overcame Edith, who sank to the floor in a death-like swoon.

CHAPTER IV.

IN EXILE.

FIVE years later.

Just five years previous to the day upon which this chapter opens, there had sailed from Liverpool, England, the convict ship *Euphrates* bound for Tasmania with a freight of one hundred and fifty exiles.

Doomed to a terrible fate.

And to one a fate worse than death.

Among the chain gang was one whose noble physique, and clear, open visage the reader is familiar with.

Sitting disconsolate, a prey to fearful despair, among the rough criminals, with head bowed, Leslie Huntley's mind went back in one swift review of the past.

And in that brief retrospect, he saw wherein he had made a fatal mistake.

But too late.

Cunning schemer had Ward Westmore proved.

It was proven that Leslie's knife was found in the murder chamber. His name had been carved upon the handle.

Moreover, in his own mansion bloody garments and other terrible circumstantial bits of evidence were found, which all combined against him at the day of the trial.

The defense was weak.

The evidence was strong.

The verdict had been rendered "guilty," and the unfortunate man received his life sentence to Tasmania.

All through the trial Edith Hawkeswood had occupied a seat in the witness-box.

Not once had her gaze left the noble, but anguished and despairing countenance of her lover.

And when the terrible verdict was rendered she almost swooned.

But she made Leslie a parting visit in his cell.

And that farewell neither ever forgot.

With his love pressed close in his strong arms, Leslie Hautley forgot for a moment his terrible sorrow.

"Heaven cannot be so cruel as to forever part us," he said. "We will—we must yet be re-united, my own love."

"Let us leave all to that higher power," said the devoted young girl. "Let us place our faith in Him. He, whom the Scripture has taught us, 'notes even the fall of a sparrow.' We will not be separated. I will go to you in your exile—to Tasmania."

"Oh, if you could. Though it were on that desert isle, I should live happy with you."

And thus the lovers had parted.

The *Euphrates* without accident reached Tasmania.

Under the walls of a fortress, whose prison-like exterior frowned down upon the little bay of Tasmania, the convicts disembarked.

Leslie did not learn his fate until late that day.

The others had been mostly dispersed.

Some to positions in the fortress, others into the interior of the island.

And against his hopes it proved Leslie's fortune to go into the interior.

A brutish-visaged military commander announced his fate to our hero, and he was marched off with his companions.

Five in number they were.

Naturally, after the first emotions of despair had left him, Leslie surveyed them one by one as those with whom his lot was cast.

And among them there was only one whom the young scion of aristocracy felt he could make an associate and confidant of.

That was a not unpleasant-faced man of thirty-five, with smooth face and kindly eyes of blue.

With him our hero struck up a pleasant acquaintance, which relieved the terrible oppression of the journey.

His name, he learned, was Harland Hope.

He was convicted of the crime of forgery, of which he declared himself innocent, and would serve only a five years' sentence.

Then he might go back to England again a free man.

"But for five years I can be your friend," he had said to Leslie, "and I will be a friend to you. Perhaps, when I go back, you can go too—don't you see?"

Well meant words of comfort, but, in his terrible depressed state of mind, Leslie could hardly accept them.

"Ah, no," he said. "I am doomed to a life exile. There is no way for me to escape. No way but to remain here—and—die here."

And now the five years had elapsed.

Harland Hope's time was up.

Even now, upon this day, the ship was weighing anchor upon which he was to leave.

And a keen pang of sorrow filled our hero's breast at the loss of his only congenial friend and companion.

CHAPTER V.

ENTRAPPED.

BUT what of Edith Hawkeswood?

After the touching farewell of her lover, the poor girl had struck out into the streets of London.

She was alone, unattended, in a great city.

Her home—her rightful own—had been usurped by a base schemer.

She could not go back there.

Better death than that.

But fortune did not desert her.

By chance she struck upon a friend.

In the streets of the great city she met with an elderly lady, a former nurse and domestic in the Hawkeswood family, by name Mrs. Larrabee.

To her she recited her sorrowful tale.

Mrs. Larrabee was an honest, kind-hearted woman and was at once enlisted in her former mistress' behalf.

"May God bless ye, dear," she had said. "I will be a friend to ye. I will see ye through. Come to my home in the West End."

To Mrs. Larrabee's humble abode Edith went.

By dint of perseverance she at length obtained employment.

The first year drifted slowly by.

And then, one day, just as she was becoming contented in her humble way of living with the good Mrs. Larrabee, the first cloud arose over her career since the parting with her lover.

One day in London she narrowly escaped being run down by a coach team.

In the carriage sat a dark-visaged man, with evil black eyes.

His gaze caught the young girl's form.

And he gave a start.

He leaned forward out of the carriage a moment, and then clutched the arm of a man by his side, Anthony Freare, his valet.

"Anthony, do you see her? Who is she?"

"I know not, master," was the reply.

"But, I do; she is Edith Hawkeswood. I have spent a year in finding her, and have failed, only now to be rewarded by a mere chance. Get out, Anthony, follow her, lose not her track."

A week after this incident, Edith received a note, which had she been less flurried in mind, she might have regarded more suspiciously.

It was worded thus:

"EDITH HAWKESWOOD.—One whom you love, and whom you have not seen in many years, desires a meeting with you. Be at St. James Square, by the statue, at half-past nine, and he will meet you. Burn this note.

"EXILE."

With fluttering heart Edith perused this epistle.

"Can it be he?" she murmured. "Can he have escaped?"

Unwarily she fell into the trap so cunningly contrived for her.

At the appointed hour, in a whirl of varied emotions, she was beneath the shadow of the great St. James Statue.

It was an unfrequented locality, and in spite of her usual good courage, she felt a strange premonition of approaching evil.

But the premonition came too late.

Later the hour waxed.

The shadows grew deeper.

Nervously she drew back into the shadows of the monument.

And at that moment arms of giant strength encircled her, she was borne backward, a gag prevented an outcry, and she was entrapped.

In the enemy's clutches.

In vain her struggles.

She was conveyed swiftly across the little square, and placed in a darkened coach.

Two men carried her and followed her into the coach, which was immediately driven rapidly away.

How far she was carried she knew not.

When at length, she was relieved of blindfold and gag, she found herself in a richly furnished apartment.

But windows and door of the room were barred.

She was virtually in a prison.

But the room looked familiar to her.

The furniture, the hangings, the pictures, she had seen them all before.

And all doubt was removed as to her fate, when the door opened, and her worst—her most dreaded enemy, Ward Westmore, stood upon the threshold.

With a mocking smile the villain advanced into the apartment.

"Ah, my dear," he said, advancing. "I welcome you back to Hawkeswood as its future mistress."

CHAPTER VI.

THE HAUNTED WING.

WARD WESTMORE'S tone was one of sarcasm.

Edith felt a terrible thrill of fear and loathing, and recoiled before him.

"Back—back! do not put a hand upon me," she said.

"What, you repel me? Why, that is surely uncharitable. I have taken you in from the streets, I shall make of you a lady. Why, my dear, why do you treat me thus? I am your friend, I assure you——"

"Stop."

The command was obeyed, though Westmore could not explain why he did it.

"Ward Westmore, you have heaped insult upon injury. Why have you practiced this vile scheme upon me? I have never injured you."

The villain's face for a moment turned black.

But he quickly recovered himself.

"You must be laboring under a delusion," he said. "I assure you, Miss Edith, you have grossly misjudged me in every way. I am truly a friend to you. I mean you well, and your interests are dear to me. Will you not accept my friendship?"

Edith Hawkeswood gazed contemptuously upon the sycophant.

And in that moment she despised him.

"Ward Westmore, never again address yourself to me in such a manner. Remember that to offer a lady insult is to merit a rich punishment, and a champion may turn up who would inflict the same upon you."

Ward Westmore's form quivered with suppressed passion. One moment he wavered.

His impulse was, in his cowardly rage to strike the speaker of this cutting remark, woman though she was.

But he restrained himself and retreated toward the door.

Upon the threshold, he spoke:

"You are high-tempered to-day, my fine little bird. But this shall be your gilded cage, here you shall remain until brought to subjection, until you are glad to come to my terms."

Then the door closed.

When he had gone Edith sank down, overcome, upon a divan.

She relapsed into a kind of stupor, out of which she did not come for some hours.

Then she arose to her feet.

"Oh, kind Heaven," she murmured, "am I doomed to this fearful captivity. Can I not escape? Is there no way?"

She paced the chamber frantically.

Then mounting a chair, she climbed up to the barred windows.

And gazing through them a strange sight met her gaze.

It was midnight.

The silver moonlight shed its incandescent light over the world without.

Below the prison window, arose the crumbling stone walls of the old west wing of the Hawkeswood mansion.

This wing had long been in disuse.

Heavy masses of ivy creep over its walls.

Below was the ancient court-yard long since gone to ruin.

Edith had roamed there many a summer day.

Tradition said that the old wing was haunted.

That in its ancient walls yet held forth the spirits of those of the Hawkeswoods who had long since passed from life.

But this, of course, was a mere vagary.

Edith had never attached any significance to it.

Though she loved the legend, and liked to think it true, the credulous country folk, of course, all averred it a truth.

Edith gazed down upon the haunted wing for some while.

And then of a sudden she gave a violent start.

A door had opened in the building, a light had flashed forth, and a human form emerged.

But in the dim moonlight it did not seem a flesh and blood reality.

She drew her breath quick and hard.

Was the legend true.

Tall, gaunt, and shadowy was the form.

And now forth from the shadows came another spectacle. Nothing more nor less than a shadowy horse.

And in the course of a few moments the horse had approached the man, who mounted him and vanished in the gloom which pervaded the grounds beyond.

Edith staggered back and sank into a chair, overcome with this startling sight.

CHAPTER VII.

WESTMORE IN THE FOREST.

FOR a moment she shivered in the chair, then she regained her composure by a strong effort, and looked forth again.

The court-yard was as before illumined in moon-rays.
But in its center now stood a dark-clad human figure.

And, as Edith gazed upon the unknown, she became assured that he was no spirit, but a flesh and blood reality.

A tall, dark-featured man, clad in a long domino, and capote over all.

Who was he?

Our heroine knew not, but an instinct prompted her to tap upon the window sash.

Perhaps he might be a friend.

Perhaps he might give her succor.

At the sound the unknown wheeled and glanced upward.

Edith gave a cry of horror and staggered back.

The face upturned to her in the moonlight was that of Ward Westmore.

Only it looked very unnatural.

Marble white in its hue, with strained eye balls, and drawn lines about the mouth.

It was indeed the usurper of Hawkeswood Grange.

He had been concealed a moment before behind an angle of the building and had observed the appearance and disappearance of the phantom horseman.

Edith sank back in a swoon.

How long she remained under its influence she knew not.

But when she came to, a Hindoo nurse, an old retainer of the Hawkeswood family, was bending over her.

Meanwhile Westmore, in the court-yard below, had noted the momentary appearance of his captive's face at the barred window.

But he only smiled grimly, and changed his position slightly.

For some time he remained standing, as though in a reverie, then he approached the door in the haunted wing from which the phantom horseman had emerged.

He tried to lift the latch.

But it resisted his efforts.

It was securely locked.

He scowled blackly at this.

"To-morrow," he muttered, "I will have that door forced, and learn what is behind it."

Turning away from the door, he crossed the court-yard.

Passing out beyond the yard wall, he stooped down in a clear spot and examined the earth.

Hoof-prints were there, and plainly visible.

The shoe-mark had a peculiar shape, being curved inward, almost vertically, and resembling strongly what might have been thought a cloven hoof.

"Ho," he ejaculated. "The strange rider bestrides a horse of flesh and blood in reality, at least!"

For some moments he scrutinized the foot-marks.

Then he arose.

It was long past midnight.

The wood before him looked black and forbidding.

But he did not hesitate.

Into the shadows he strode, and continued on among the trees, until of a sudden he came out upon the shores of a little lake in the center of the forest.

Beyond the moonlit waters arose the tall monarchs of the wood, like black sentinels of the night.

With folded arms, Westmore stood gazing reflectively down into the waters.

And unconsciously he broke out with a scarcely audible soliloquy.

"I am master of Hawkeswood. A twelvemonth past, I was but a penniless dependant. Baron Hawkeswood was murdered, and the man upon whose shoulders the guilt has been placed is in Tasmania expiating the alleged crime. He was also my rival in love, and now he is out of the way forever, as effectually removed from my path as though he were dead."

Not a sound broke the somber stillness.

The time sped by and still Westmore remained enwrapped in reverie.

Then a startling thing transpired.

The waters of the lake rippled.

A dark dripping form emerged from them almost at Westmore's feet.

For a moment so astounded was the villain, that he could hardly distinguish whether the new-comer were man or beast.

Then, the unknown had gained the bank.

And Westmore saw that it was a man.

Dripping and uncouth was the man, and he started at sight of Westmore, and would have slunk away had it not been for the usurper.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ENCOUNTER IN THE WOODS.

WESTMORE started forward.

He acted upon an impulse.

Putting forth one hand, he said sternly:

"Hold, who are you?"

In putting forth his hand he grasped the unknown's wet garments.

No reply was vouchsafed him.

Only a sort of shivering moan seemed to come from the other's lips.

Then he made a quick movement to throw off Westmore's grip.

"Not so fast, my friend."

Westmore was acting under the firm belief that he had captured a poacher upon his grounds.

"I will learn you to trespass upon my domain," he said.

"Ha—what——"

He did not finish the sentence.

Finding himself unable to break away, the unknown had turned upon the usurper like a tiger.

And they became involved in a terrific struggle.

Back and forth they swayed.

Not a word did Westmore's antagonist speak, only moaned and snarled like a wild beast, and gritted his teeth.

By this time Westmore had arrived at the ultimatum that he was struggling with a maniac.

A terrible struggle it was.

Now the maniac had the advantage.

And then Westmore's gigantic strength gave him the better hold.

About the glade whirled the combatants.

No witness was there of the struggle.

It became more terrific.

Now both were upon the ground.

"Curse you, fiend!" panted Westmore, as he struggled.

"Man or devil, whatever you are I will learn."

But in spite of his anger and excitement Westmore could not help a certain mystified feeling.

"What can it be?" went through his mind. "Maniac or fiend? Ah! can it be the phantom rider of the haunted wing?"

This flashed upon him as the truth.

"But who is it?" constituted an enigma not easily solved.

In spite of his own great strength Westmore felt that he was no match for the unknown.

And that he would get the worst of the fray eventually.

So he resolved upon a piece of strategy.

Feigning weakness he relaxed his hold.

To his surprise his antagonist did the same.

And now the most surprising thing of all transpired.

Finding the hold relaxed upon him the maniac broke away in spite of the fact that he had his adversary at a disadvantage, and, clearing himself, sprang away into the forest.

Too late, Westmore sprang after him.

With a wild, ringing laugh the maniac was gone.

His retreating footsteps crashed through the undergrowth, and, a moment later the shrill neigh of a horse rose upon the air, and the clatter of horses' hoofs were wafted to the pursuer's ear.

Westmore, torn, bleeding, and much discomfited after his severe and fruitless struggle, listened to these sounds with an inexplicable sensation of awe.

"Mystery of mysteries," he ejaculated. "But I will unearth it, if it costs me my fortune. I will first learn the secret of the haunted wing."

He returned slowly, and in no comfortable frame of mind, to the mansion.

The remainder of the night was sleepless to him.

In the early morning all of the family retainers were summoned.

Westmore catechized them sharply.

"The west wing 'as always been 'aunted, sur," said one of the butlers. "I 'ave been in 'awkeswood for nigh onto forty year, sur, an' it 'ave bin 'aunted since then, sur."

"Haunted, bosh! don't let me hear you talk that way again, Fitzgerald. But stop, what do you mean by haunted?"

"Why, sur—eh—'ave seen 'em myself, sur. Real spooks, sur. White gowns an' all, sur. God save us, but it's the truth, my lord——"

"Enough," said Westmore, impatiently. "That is enough of that. Prepare to accompany me all of you at once to this wing. I will have it razed to the ground, but I will unearth its mystery."

A murmur of dismay and fear went up among the superstitious retainers.

But their master's word was law, and could not be gainsaid. So a half hour later the long fastened doors between the mansion and the old wing were battered in preparatory to the search.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT WAS FOUND IN THE WING.

WESTMORE was recklessly bent upon his purpose of exploring the haunted wing.

He meant every word when he expressed his determination to batter the place down but he would learn its mystery.

The old servants shook their heads solemnly and averred that,

"Nae gude will come ha' it."

The doors between the mansion and the wing had been nailed for more than fifty years.

Indeed, so long had they been up that the wood had molded, and crumbled away easily.

The usurper directed the work himself, and did not pause until the entrance was made open.

Then leading the way, with lighted taper, followed by the shivering servants, he began his tour of investigation.

The old wing was what had once been the original manor.

Many generations of Hawkeswoods had been reared beneath its roof.

Knights with plumed crests and glittering armor had once trod the stone corridors and went forth from the high arches.

Damp and chill was the atmosphere.

Even Westmore felt the depressing effect, much like that experienced in going out of the bright world into a tomb.

Chamber after chamber was explored until finally the lower rooms were reached.

But not a sign of living being was found.

Nothing but the rats which scampered away at their approach.

As they progressed and nothing was found to excite any alarm, the servants' courage began to rise.

The lower rooms had been all explored and Westmore had arrived at the conclusion that his search was to be rewarded with nothing, when a cry from the head butler attracted his attention.

In the solid masonry of the wall of the old manor, was set a long marble plate.

Upon this plate, was engraved in rude fashion the genealogy of the Hawkeswood family from medieval times.

But it was not this fact which had excited the exclamation of the head butler.

With blanched face and trembling knees, he stood pointing to a spectacle which when it met the gaze of the others was the cause of a general cry of horror and superstition.

Westmore gazed upon it and reeled back with a corpse-like pallor.

The nature of the spectacle warranted this.

At the base of the list of names appeared an inscription.

This inscription was what had struck fear to the hearts of the spectators.

Thus read the inscription:

"Lastly—Baron John Hawkeswood,

"Son of Edwin and Judith Hawkeswood.

"For eighteen years master of the manor,

"Born at Hawkeswood, July 12th, 18—

"Foully murdered in his bed by a dependant—a viper long nourished in his bosom.

"Vengeance will shortly overtake the murderer—may his ashes rest in peace. Requiescat in Requiem."

It was not alone this mysterious and startling inscription which impressed the usurper.

But the chirography itself.

It was traced in letters of blood.

And below upon the marble floor was a huge splash of blood.

Blood marked the tessellated floor, was upon the window-panes, and streaked the walls.

A terrible dizziness came over Ward Westmore.

He reeled and would have fallen had it not been for the head butler.

Morally and physically Westmore was a coward.

Beyond a bullying spirit he was nothing, and now his courage forsook him like snow before a spring shower.

Cries of terror went up from the servants who huddled frightened together.

And at that moment, well-calculated to increase the terror, there went through the stone arches a low, deep moan, succeeded by a wild, devilish, ringing peal of laughter.

How Ward Westmore got out of the place he never knew.

Servants and master fled awe-struck and terrified from the spot.

An hour later, in a terribly excited and nervous frame of mind, the usurper reclined upon a couch in his chamber with attendants bathing his brow.

Was the old wing haunted?

CHAPTER X.

WESTMORE'S PROPOSAL.

IN her prison chamber Edith reclined upon her couch.

A feverish anxiety brooded over her mind and a strange uneasiness assailed her.

A premonition of something, she hardly knew what, had weighed upon her mind all that day.

The shadows of night had long since settled down.

She was alone, and the oil light had burned low upon a stand at her bedside.

Her mind unconsciously wandered across the sea to that unknown clime where her lover, an exile, was doomed to abide.

"My love," she murmured, "I may never see him again. And I promised to go to Tasmania to meet him there and share his exile. God help me! Is there no way for me to escape from this terrible place?"

She arose to her feet and paced the floor in a whirl of anguish and despair.

"If I could but escape," she murmured. "But I cannot break those window bars. They resist my best efforts. Why, oh, Heaven! why is Fate so cruel to me?"

With a desperation born of despair, she, for the hundredth time, mounted the sill and applied her strength to the barred window.

Fiercely she worked.

The night wind blew in her face dank and wet.

A storm was brewing in the night without.

The wind went sighing and moaning about the old manor like the weird plaint of a discontented spirit.

She shivered as the chill wind smote her.

But did not desist in her work.

Eagerly she worked.

Back and forth her light frame swayed.

Desperation was in her face.

Ha! a thrill shot through her breast, the iron loosens in the stones.

The cement is easily broken.

Her breath came quick and short.

The bar yields.

One swift, upward pull, it is displaced.

And at that moment, a moment of triumph, a sound strikes her hearing which causes every nerve in her body to vibrate.

It was a footstep without in the corridor.

Was it the nurse visiting her at that unwelcome hour?

She slid down from her position.

The key grated in the lock.

The door turned upon its hinges.

Across the threshold stalked a human form.

With an exclamation of terror and disgust, Edith recoiled.

It was the usurper Westmore, her most dreaded enemy.

And instinctively one thing flashed through her mind.

What was the villain's mission?

With dignity she faced her enemy.

There was a stern, hard smile upon Westmore's evil face.

He entered and closed the door.

"I have made you a later visit than is consistent with ceremony," he said, with sarcasm.

"I perceive it," was Edith's quiet reply.

"But under the circumstances I do not think that ceremony should longer exist between us. You are so shortly to become mine——"

"Never!"

At the emphasis of this word, Westmore, in spite of himself, recoiled.

"What! Do you refuse to accept my terms?" he exclaimed.

"I make no terms with such as you," said Edith, with spirit. "Ward Westmore, never again insult me with such a proposition as you have made. I would sooner die than wed with you!"

Westmore bit his lip.

"You are forcible in your rejection of my suit," he said.

"Stay, my haughty queen. Will you not tell me why you refuse to become my wife?"

"Because I loathe you."

Lurid lightning leaped from Westmore's eyes.

"Ah, you do!" he cried angrily. "Well, loathe, hate, and despise me as much as you will, by fair means or foul you shall marry me. Remember, you shall be mine. I have sworn it, by all the powers of heaven and earth. Prepare yourself, then, for your fate."

The door clanged behind him.

Edith reeled, with a terrible faintness, but recovered herself.

"Now I must escape," she breathed hoarsely. "God help me. It is my only chance."

Back to the window she flew.

One good wrench now displaced the bar, and the avenue of escape was open.

CHAPTER XI.

EDITH'S ESCAPE.

BENEATH the prison window grew a profusion of vines. They were wood ivy, and tough of fibre, and easily capable of sustaining her weight.

Grasping these, she swung over the sill.

It was a great distance to the ground below.

How she made the descent, she never clearly remembered.

But finally her feet touched the earth.

She was *free*.

Above her head was the clouded sky, overhung with black storm-clouds. Beneath her feet all was damp and sodden.

But she ran on, in the darkness, hardly knowing whither her footsteps carried her—hardly caring, so long as it carried her to freedom.

The wind whistled drearily.

The falling rain wet her through.

Her garments were torn and sodden, her faculties became benumbed with cold and wet, and finally, almost exhausted, she sank down to gain a moment's rest.

It was in the edge of a clump of shrubbery.

And as she lay there, striving to overcome the terrible drowsy lassitude which came over her, a startling thing happened.

A dark form of a sudden loomed up over her.

Some hideous unknown monster bent down and touched her.

Two gleaming eye-balls were fastened upon her, a fearful fetid breath fanned her cheek.

With a wild thrilling scream, Edith recoiled, but her strength left her, and a swoon relieved her of all further realization.

At the scream, the monster started back, and had one been near enough in the gloom to see clearly, it could easily have been perceived that the unknown which had so frightened our heroine was nothing more nor less than a horse.

Saddle and bridle was upon the animal.

And his rider was not far away, for at the scream a dark human form came hurrying up through the gloom.

The form bent over our heroine.

A light flashed in his hand.

And the upturned face of Edith in the rain, caused him to utter an ejaculation.

The light was put out, and the unknown paused a moment as though in deliberation.

Had Edith have possessed her faculties when the light illumined her features, she would have made a startling discovery.

And this was that the features of the man bending over her were identical with those of the phantom rider, whom she had seen emerge from the haunted wing the night before.

Whoever the mysterious personage was, he evinced a noble spirit, for a moment later with our heroine's insensible form in his arms, he had mounted his horse.

Giving him rein, the mysterious horseman dashed away into the gloom.

He rode rapidly, and for some distance.

Then a light burst forth in his path.

It emanated from the window of a small forester's cottage.

Before reaching the cottage he dismounted.

Bearing Edith tenderly in his arms he approached the door of the rude dwelling, and deposited her upon the doorstep.

Then rapped loudly upon the door.

And a moment later the honest peasant who came to the door found only the dripping insensible form of a beautiful young girl there.

For some days, until she had regained her strength, Edith remained at the peasant cottage.

The events of that night were a mystery to her.

As soon as she had sufficiently recuperated she thanked her benefactors, and took her leave.

Now that she was out of Westmore's clutches, she was resolved not to fall into them again.

She had money enough to take her to London, whither she proceeded.

But she did not intend to remain there long. The first steamer would take her to Tasmania to rejoin her lover, now the only friend she believed on earth.

But one day at her lodgings in London, a short, square built man with keen ferret eyes presented himself.

When he was shown into her presence, he was revealed to her astonished gaze, as Bob Berkeley, the London detective.

"Never fear, miss," he said, cheerily. "You are all right. Your lover is cleared of the murder, and will come back from Tasmania, and Hawkeswood belongs to you after all."

CHAPTER XII.

THE USURPER UNMASKED.

WHEN he discovered the flight of his fair prey the next morning, Ward Westmore was frantic with rage.

He cursed the servants, raved about the mansion and made a pandemonium for a while.

But when he found that all this was of no avail, he settled down into a calmer frame of mind.

A search was instituted for the missing "ward," so-called.

But no trace of her could be found.

After this the usurper's mind changed.

Pursued by a dread, phantom-like premonition of downfall, he resorted to fatal measures to drown this oppression.

He launched recklessly into dissipation.

For a while he succeeded in drowning all thoughts of such nature.

But the end soon came.

An avenging Nemesis was upon his track.

And the fatal crisis at length presented itself.

One night the villain had returned late from a drunken spree in London.

No carriage awaited him at the station, and he was obliged to walk to the Hall.

It was a moonlight night, and Westmore was far enough recovered from his drunk to become cognizant of things about.

Indeed, he had not been in so sober a state before for many weeks.

The road from the railway station to Hawkeswood led through a stretch of pine woods.

And the villain had not traversed half the road, when of a sudden, a tall, gigantic form loomed up in his path.

With a cry of horror he sprang back.

The face of the person before him was terribly white and drawn.

His eyes blazed like a panther's, and his long talon-like fingers worked convulsively.

Westmore recognized him at a glance.

It was the mysterious phantom horseman, whom he had witnessed emerge from the haunted wing that night.

It was his Nemesis.

The usurper seemed to realize this.

He cowered back for a moment, and then would have attempted an escape, but the mysterious horseman's voice restrained him.

"Usurper, murderer, stand before a Hawkeswood. Your last hour has come. A message has been sent from Hell to call you thither, and the powers have decreed that I shall send you there. Ha—ha—I shall redden my hands with your foul blood. I, a Hawkeswood—but it is fitting, as you have stained yours with a Hawkeswood's life-current."

Shivering with a nameless terror, the usurper gasped:

"In Heaven's name, who are you?"

"Who am, I? Ha—ha—write it in letters of blood. I am a Hawkeswood. A brother long since believed dead—but come back, to avenge the foul murder and usurpation. Ha—blood—blood—I must have it in atonement."

The maniac's shriek rang out loud and shrill.

And in that instant the truth flashed across Westmore's mind.

He remembered that John Hawkeswood had a brother, an idiot, who had wandered away from home long years ago.

This was the brother in the land of the living.

He realized that it was to be a life and death struggle.

He plunged his hand in his bosom and clutched the hilt of a knife.

It flashed forth.

The maniac was upon him.

Like a wild beast he came.

Foaming and gnashing his teeth he clutched the usurper.

Once—twice—the bright-bladed knife arose and fell.

A shrill cry of agony followed.

But the maniac seemed endowed with a second life.

With the frenzy of a dying man, he clutched the fatal wrist.

Bore it back with a madman's strength. With all force the keen knife was reverted, and ere Westmore's vast strength could interpose it fell with a thud upon his breast.

The next moment the maniac was quivering upon the ground in his death throes.

It had been a terrible struggle.

Westmore was victorious, but at the cost of his own life.

The wound was a fatal one, and he was enabled merely to drag himself home and expire a few hours later.

The avenging Nemesis had performed his work, and the villain's evil deeds were done.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EXILE'S PERIL.

MEANWHILE in far away Tasmania our hero, Leslie Huntley, was languishing in his imprisonment upon a lonely isle.

Not a word had he received from home.

The fate of those dear to him—of one very dear to him, namely Edith Hawkeswood, he could only conjecture.

His life in Tasmania was an exceedingly odious one.

He was subjected to insults, rough talk, and even blows, and many a time was only restrained from resenting them, by the bitter realization that such a course would only add to the misery of his lot.

He made one good friend.

And he was the only person he met during his exile who was congenial company.

And the man was Harland Hope.

His sentence was for five years.

While Leslie's was for life.

"Did I not have a wife and dear friends at home," said Hope, "I would never go home, but remain here with you, my dear friend, and share your life's imprisonment."

"I can understand your desire to get home," said Leslie, sadly. "There is one very dear to me in England, whom I would give half my life to be able to rejoin."

One day Hope and Leslie were commissioned for a trip into the interior.

The locality to which they were dispatched was an unfrequented part of the island.

Their errand was to convey a message to a party of mine inspectors.

A thick jungle fifty miles wide and a wide plain of forty miles' surface were the territory to be traversed.

But neither were displeased with the idea of the trip.

While it had its perils, it offered them a diversion which was welcome.

They set forth early in the morning, well equipped for a journey of the sort.

The first day's tramp—for the entire ninety miles was to be accomplished on foot—embraced a walk of thirty miles by easy stages.

This brought them into the thickest of the jungle.

It was known that the interior of the island was infested with bushmen.

So far they had encountered no signs of them.

But there was imminent danger of falling in with these ruffians at any moment.

So our friends kept on their guard.

Finally they reached their destination without any happening worthy of note.

And turning homeward, had accomplished half the distance, when the dreaded calamity presented itself.

Of a sudden, from behind trees and bushes in their path, there appeared a score or more of fierce-looking men, half-clad, and armed with keen-bladed cutlasses and carbines.

Neither Leslie nor Hope was a coward.

But their faces paled at the scene before them.

"We will die game," said brave Hope.

"Amen to that," echoed Leslie.

And side by side, the two brave men held the score of cut-throats at bay.

Taking refuge behind a pile of bowlders, the bushmen kept a respectful distance from their death-dealing rifles.

As might be expected, the bushmen, though fierce and bloodthirsty, were cowards.

They would not venture within range of the convicts' guns.

But this advantage was the sole one in favor of our friends.

They could not hold their position a great while.

The bushmen formed a cordon about them.

They dared not stir from the protection of the bowlders, no more than their enemies dared to advance upon them.

Five days the siege lasted.

During that time neither food nor drink was procurable.

It was a slow death by starvation, and finally Hope becoming desperate, said:

"It's no use, Leslie, I am going to make a break for liberty. If I lose my life, it is as well as to die here like a rat in his hole."

Leslie's heart sank in his breast.

This was to be his fate.

It was a bitter thought, and he choked back with difficulty the terrible despair which would overwhelm him.

But at the last moment, fortune interposed in their behalf.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHICH IS THE LAST.

At length Hope became resolved to endure the situation no longer.

"Here goes," he said, strapping his knapsack to his back. "Root hog or die. It is as well to die in the open field as in a hole. Will you go, Leslie?"

"I am with you," said our hero, sadly.

The heroic convicts emerged from their little fortress among the bowlders, and struck out into the open field.

They expected almost momentarily to be riddled with rifle-balls, but they never came.

Not a bushman showed himself.

And of a sudden, a little ways off, came the sound of firing.

And then loud yells and shouts.

The next moment a body of horsemen came into view across the clearing.

They were all armed, and wore the Queen's uniform.

"The cavalry!—thank Heaven!" cried Hope. "We are all right."

It was, indeed, a detachment of cavalry.

They had arrived just in the nick of time.

The day was saved.

A moment more and the cavalry came up.

Congratulations were exchanged, and the cavalymen furnished the two convicts with horses, and escorted them in safety to Fort Sutton.

This little episode had taken place just five weeks before the expiration of Hope's time.

Finally, the day came when he was to return to England.

With a sinking heart, Leslie went down to the wharf with his friend to bid him a last farewell.

And here a startling surprise awaited him.

The night before, H. M. S. Marmion, a frigate of war, had hove into the bay.

Now a boat-load was just effecting a landing.

And, though Leslie did not at once notice those who disembarked, he was made aware of their identity a moment later by a glad, familiar voice, and a light female form flying across the wharf.

"Leslie, I am here. I have come to save you—to take you back to England. You are cleared of the murder by Ward Westmore's own confession, and can go back with us to-day."

Leslie Huntley received the light form in his arms, strained her he loved to his breast once, caught a momentary glimpse of Bob Berkeley, the detective, standing with grinning visage beyond, then a mist came before his vision and he had fainted.

* * * * *

Reader my tale is finished.

You can readily guess the sequel.

Suffice it to say, that Hawkeswood Grange is now in the happy possession of its rightful owner, and Huntley Hall is on its former good footing.

The mystery was cleared up by the death of Westmore and the maniac rider, and now, leaving our friends in their happiness, I will say adieu.

[THE END.]

HORACE APPLETON, the author of this story, is also the author of the following stories published in THE WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY: No. 567 "Fred Hazard, No. 561 "The Man of Gold," No. 556, "The Coral Cave," No. 543 "From Pole to Pole," No. 536 "Special Express Ned," No. 520 "Ben Bolt."

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